

Heat Illness

In August 2001, Tracey Jaurena, an athletic trainer in Coalinga, Calif., was working on a football field when a friend called her cell phone number. The caller said Jaurena's son Abe, 12, had collapsed during practice nearby with his youth football league.

"When I got there, Abe's face was blotchy and I kept calling his name, but he couldn't answer me," she says. Jaurena cooled Abe down until emergency workers arrived and he was treated for dehydration at the hospital. Jaurena believes Abe got sick because it was at least 95 F that day, the players were inappropriately dressed in full uniform, and Abe hadn't had a water break in close to an hour. "It was also the third day of football practice and it's important to acclimate athletes to the weather," she says.

During heat illness, the body's cooling system shuts down. Body temperature goes up, which inhibits the ability to sweat. Mild symptoms of heat exhaustion include thirst, fatigue, and cramps in the legs or abdomen. Left untreated, heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke. Serious heat-related symptoms include dizziness, headaches, nausea, rapid heartbeat, vomiting, decreased alertness, and a temperature as high as 105 F or more. In severe cases, the liver, kidneys, and brain may be damaged. About 400 people die each year from heat exposure, according to the CDC.

The risk of heat illness goes up during exertion and sports and with certain health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. Alcohol use also increases the risk. So do medications that slow sweat production such as antihistamines, tricyclic antidepressants, and diuretics used to treat water retention, high blood pressure, and some liver and kidney conditions.

People ages 65 and older and young children are especially vulnerable to heat illness. During the summer of 2003, at least 42 children in the United States died after being left in hot cars, according to Jan Null, a meteorologist in San Francisco who tracks heat-related deaths. What some people don't realize is that the temperature inside a car can climb much higher than temperatures outside during a sunny day. Heat stroke in children can occur within minutes, even if a car window is opened slightly.

What you can do: Air conditioning is the No. 1 protective factor against heat illness. If you don't have air conditioning, spend time in public facilities, such as libraries and malls that have air conditioning. Reduce strenuous activities or do them during early mornings and evenings when it's cooler. If you're outside for long stretches of time, carry a water bottle, drink fluids regularly, and don't push your limits. People who play sports should wear light, loose-fitting clothes and drink water or sports drinks before, during, and after activity. If you see someone experiencing heat illness, have the person lie down in a cool place and elevate the legs. Use water, wet towels, and fanning to help cool the person down until emergency help comes.

<http://www.creative-years.com/creative-years-news/summer-safety-tips-for-children/>